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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CANADA PROVINCIAL ELECTION: MANITOBA RE-ELECTS NEW
DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP)

Ref: Ottawa 01325

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1. SUMMARY. As expected, Manitoba Premier Gary Doer and his left-of-center New Democratic Party (NDP) won a second majority government in the June 3 elections. The Manitoba NDP is a strong proponent of the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly and a driving force behind Canadian opposition to U.S. proposals to alleviate flooding of North Dakota's Devils Lake. End Summary.

No Major Campaign Issues

2. The campaign featured no major issues and registered relatively little enthusiasm among the Manitoba electorate. Though voter turnout dipped to 55 percent (the norm is 69 percent), observers of Manitoba politics say the "low" turnout is a sign of satisfaction with the status quo. Aided by a strong economy and low unemployment rate, the ruling NDP gained 3 new seats in the Legislature. Preliminary results showed the NDP winning 49 percent of the popular vote (vs. 44 percent in 1999). With 20 seats and 36 percent of the vote, the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party will remain the official Opposition party.

No Change for U.S. Interests

3. We expect little change for U.S. interests in Manitoba under the second Doer government. Manitoba will continue to be a driving force behind Canadian opposition to inter-basin water transfers (Devils Lake, NAWS, etc.) and support for the Canadian Wheat Board headquartered in Winnipeg. At the same time, Gary Doer places a premium on Manitoba's relationship with the United States, which is the destination for nearly 80% of Manitoba's exports. He has been successful in quashing some of the anti-American rhetoric within the provincial party, and was visibly absent earlier this year when some of his Cabinet and Caucus joined protests opposing U.S. military action in Iraq. Rarely is the blatant anti-Americanism of the federal NDP publicly manifested in Manitoba's NDP, though the sentiment is present.

4. The Premier enjoys close personal relations with Ambassador Cellucci and the leaders of several states (Minnesota, Missouri, Texas, South Dakota). He will press ahead with further development of Manitoba hydroelectricity generation potential, and actively solicit U.S. markets for surplus hydroelectricity.

5. COMMENT. The NDP conducted a cautious campaign. In resisting some pressure to adopt a more "leftist" agenda, the party was able to hold greater appeal for the middle-class suburban voters that tend to decide Manitoba elections. Premier Doer's personal popularity and his image as a centrist politician were key factors in enabling the NDP to steal three suburban Winnipeg seats from Conservative incumbents, as well as one open Conservative seat. Though the NDP made province-wide gains in the popular vote, however, it failed to make any significant breakthrough into the PC's rural base.

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